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Comments:

I'm writing to object to both of the two remaining proposed actionable alternatives for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Public Motorized Travel Management Plan (#22692). Although I have not been an active participant in the long, careful process of crafting these alternatives, I have read all of the published materials to form an informed opinion as a public landowner.

In addition to reading the published materials, I am a native Arizonan and a long-time and frequent visitor to the Apache Sitgreaves National Forest (ASNF). I have extensive on-the-ground experience in the backcountry of the ASNF and I will be directly impacted by whichever decision is taken for every future visit.

Alternative 1, No Action, is not a possibility because a travel management plan is necessary and it's not reasonable to leave 1.6 million acres open to cross-country motorized travel.

Alternative 2, the proposed action, is objectionable in two main respects.

1) Designation of 182 miles of motorized trails open ONLY to motorized vehicles less than 50 inches wide serves no useful purpose and has many disadvantages. It would provide a massive subsidy to the ATV industry and it would give an unfair advantage to people that can afford to purchase and maintain an ATV in addition to a truck or SUV. ATVs are typically noisier than traditional vehicles, and therefore have a disproportionate negative impact on users for whom solitude and quiet are highly valued. They are often designed to be operated in a more aggressive manner than traditional vehicles, causing more physical damage to the roadbed and causing more dust and damage to fragile stream-crossings. In short, if a motorized trail is open to ATVs, it should be open to any motorized vehicle. The Forest Service should not be in the business of supporting and subsidizing the market for the manufacturers of ATVs and UTVs at the expense of traditional Forest users and other taxpayers.

2) Opening currently closed roads and creating new roads is not reasonable when the ASNF staff and Arizona Game and Fish Department are already unable to maintain and patrol the existing road system. Even though Alternative 2 would have 15% fewer miles of open roads, opening closed roads and closing currently open roads will consume a huge amount of Forest Service resources in the short term. There will also be a very significant increase in the need for enforcement for the first few years, since many users will probably be violating the new rules until they realize that enforcement is happening. Opening more roads will negatively impact habitat for wildlife, whether endangered, threatened or not. It would also negatively impact users like myself who visit the ASNF primarily to find quiet and solitude. Many of the roads that are planned to be re-opened or created would provide motorized access to areas that are already easily accessed by a short walk or horseback ride. Creating roads that run parallel to each other less than three miles apart will ruin the ambiance of large areas for those of us who have been hiking and hunting these places on foot. It would make much more sense to begin by closing all of those roads targeted for closure in this travel management plan and not open any additional roads or motorized trails. The process of opening new roads and motorized trails should be addressed in a future travel management plan once the users of the ASNF have adapted to a more regulated experience.

Alternative 3 would address my objections to Alternative 2, but in my opinion it goes too far in the direction of limiting motorized access. The elimination of motorized retrieval of elk is unnecessary because it causes very minimal and highly dispersed impacts. However, it would cause a lot of resentment in hunters who have grown up using motorized retrieval and who have seen that it doesn't cause lasting impacts on the landscape. Likewise, dispersed camping has not caused much degradation to the environment in my experience, and should still be allowed. Alternative 3 would also close several roads that I have grown very fond of using. I would prefer that all authorized Forest Service roads remain open for the time being, while all user created wildcat roads are closed. Thanks very much for the opportunity to participate in the planning process for our public lands.